

# Wabash Reflections



*ℒ - news presented by the Wabash River Heritage Corridor Commission (WRHCC).*

***"You must live in the present, launch yourself on every wave, find your eternity in each moment. Fools stand on their island opportunities and look toward another land. There is no other land, there is no other life but this." - Henry David Thoreau***

And with this quote the Wabash River embarks on another year. Have you got your resolutions ready? Have you broken any yet? Whatever your answer, I trust you are putting your efforts on behalf of the river high up on your priority list. After all, though the river always flows down stream, it is up to every one of us to keep it from going 'down hill'. Have a great 2008!

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## **Adams County Paves the Way—Only One Set of Trusses Need Apply**

- According to a study by Commonwealth Engineers, Inc., provided by Doug Milligan, Clerk-Treasurer of the Town of Geneva, Adams County, Indiana.

There is a vision in northeastern Indiana of a network of trails that will provide pedestrians and bicycle enthusiasts with the opportunity to leave their cars behind and travel not only throughout the eleven Indiana counties in the region but into the States of Ohio and Michigan as well. Backed by the Adams County Board of Commissioners, this vision has been embraced by local government agencies and private associations, teaming together to plan and lobby for support.



One such teaming effort includes the Town of Geneva, the City of Berne, and the South Adams Recreational Trail Committee. Their goal is the development of over seven miles of multi-use path. Their first priority is to provide a 3.5 mile path along the former Grand Rapids & Indiana Railroad corridor as a direct connection between Geneva and Berne. The red line marking U.S. 27 on the river map for Adams County at [http://in.gov/wrhcc/pdfs/Map\\_1.pdf](http://in.gov/wrhcc/pdfs/Map_1.pdf) traces this route.

Like the railroad before it (and the river even before that), this route will provide a facility for alternative modes of transportation – greatly needed for the large Amish population of the area.

Along with funding (it goes without saying but I'll say it anyway), the largest stumbling block to this path is the Wabash River crossing. When the rail corridor fell into disuse, it was decided to dismantle the weathering steel trusses which had so steadfastly carried the rails across the river. The man hired to do the work, however, lost interest after removing the south half of the bridge. On the positive side, this has left the north trusses available for use. Unfortunately, studies show that most path users prefer to get all the way across the river.

The necessary bridge crossing is a little over a mile north of Geneva, with the Wabash running near due west at the spot. Geneva is a river town, however, as the Wabash comes from the south to reach the crossing, essentially parallel to the rail corridor, until it arrives in Geneva from the east at its confluence with Loblolly Creek. After the 1872 construction of the Geneva depot by the G.R. & I., Geneva was incorporated in 1874 merging with it the communities of Alexander (circa 1838) and Buffalo (circa 1853). After the discovery of oil in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, the town's future looked promising. Two devastating fires in the business community in 1895, and the oil field's quick depletion by 1915, left that future much more in doubt. The Wabash River leaves no one without hope, however. Today, Geneva is thriving with significant tourism generated by the Gene Stratton Porter home, the Limberlost State Historic Site, the Loblolly Swamp (pictured) and the last covered bridge on the Wabash – the Ceylon Bridge.

More Adams County info is at: [http://www.in.gov/mylocal/adams\\_county.htm](http://www.in.gov/mylocal/adams_county.htm) or you can get census-type data and a map at [http://www.city-data.com/county/Adams\\_County-IN.html](http://www.city-data.com/county/Adams_County-IN.html).

## **A Bridge is Hired – Carroll County Puts Opportunity To Blue Use.**

- From news heard told by Dan McCain, Canal Center, Delphi, Carroll County

On a 'special' Sunday in late 2007, over 200 people came to celebrate the restoration of a 1905 Stearns Truss iron bridge over the Wabash & Erie Canal stub or "side cut" in west Delphi. Starting with emergency funds from the Historic Landmarks Foundation, finishing with the last of the Wabash River Heritage **Corridor Fund** from 1999, and visiting as many funding agencies as they could in between, the good folk from Delphi had done it again! An historic bridge was saved and a new trail section added to the Wabash River **Heritage Corridor Trail**!

It started with obtaining the rights to the structure in December 2005, with the 'catch' that it had to be out of the way of construction on the Big Monon Ditch (Pulaski County) by April 1st. Though the dry winter sped the ditch construction toward the site, it also allowed volunteers to have the bridge in pieces and loaded on a farmer's donated semi by March 3rd. The following week the ditch flooded all the way up and onto Highway 14.

Money and God's weather weren't their only lucky strokes, however. Volunteers were the backbone of this rescue. Volunteers like the Nielsen family (pictured) that had lived near, and loved, the rusting bridge. Their son Brad, four years earlier as a Boy Scout Eagle candidate, wrote up the



National Register nomination. The Nielsen's came to Delphi early in the process just to check it out. They became enthused for Delphi's trails and orientation to historic relics. Later, at the time of cutting the decking boards, they were the dynamos of the day. They set the pace as the heavy 17 ft. oak planks were coming off the three portable sawmills; sizing them, placing them and nailing them down. Their effort, along with Jim Cooper, Vern Mesler, Ross Brown, Betty Simons (to name just a couple of those who lent special knowledge) and, in the end, thousands of hours of work by the core volunteers, supplied by a total of 78 willing helpers, made this project a successful community restoration effort.

The new surroundings for this bridge are historic also. The canal and spur once fed water power to two millraces. Paper mills were located on the west side next to the towpath producing high quality rag paper products well past the mid-1800s. There were warehouses on the east side for storage and receipt of canal cargo in the heyday of the canal. Now added onsite, in conjunction with the Indiana Department of Environmental Management, are two wetlands providing interpretive habitat for Indiana's native plant species.

This past November 11<sup>th</sup>, the crowd roared hooray when the final 'golden spike' was driven into the white oak deck of the now bright blue bridge. A special feature on dedication day was dialog



about the Winamac Bridge Company and the Stearns patent used to produce this span. A highlight was the 1903 Winton automobile owned by Dr Peter Kesling from LaPorte, the same vehicle that traveled across the US from coast to coast in 2003 to celebrate the 100th anniversary of the nation's first transcontinental crossing by a similar 1903 Winton, crossing the span to mark its official new life as part of the **Wabash River Heritage Corridor Trail**.

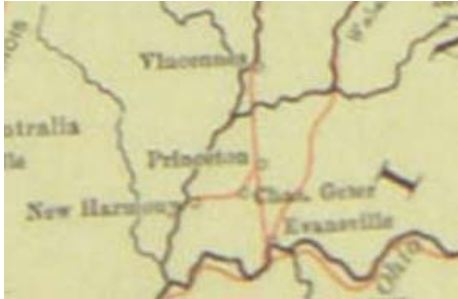
More Carroll County info is at: [http://www.in.gov/mylocal/carroll\\_county.htm](http://www.in.gov/mylocal/carroll_county.htm) or you can get census-type data and a map at [http://www.city-data.com/county/Carroll\\_County-IN.html](http://www.city-data.com/county/Carroll_County-IN.html). Just for fun, check out the river in Carroll County at [http://in.gov/wrhcc/pdfs/Map\\_4.pdf](http://in.gov/wrhcc/pdfs/Map_4.pdf) and some river photos at [http://www.wabashriver.us/access\\_points/french\\_post\\_park/index.htm](http://www.wabashriver.us/access_points/french_post_park/index.htm).

## **The Wabash's Past and Current in Gibson County** - a reflection by N. Sherrell Marginet, river commissioner for Gibson County

As the end of the Last Wisconsin Glacier became water and terminal moraine, a glorious stream of water moved from the East to its present location. This beautiful flowing stream in future geological ages became known as the Wabash River.

This stream originally filled and dammed itself west of present day Ft. Branch and trans-located to the gravel bed structure that comprises the West boundary of Gibson County. This actually started near Terre Haute and sought the looser material to create the path of the Almighty Wabash. Perhaps no river is as loaded with history and folklore as the adopted river of our beloved State of Indiana.

As I sat in Geology 101 in 1952, I remember a world renowned professor by the name of Starkey lecture on his part in planning the Invasion of North Africa and Normandy. His main exposition did not stop there, he went on to indicate that the most varied topography in the world started at the Wabash River and extended east to a town named Mackey. He indicated that this area had the most varied topographical crest in the world. Gibson County and the Wabash River made up a phenomenon known only to the learned who study the earth=s surface.



Gibson County and the Wabash River were a part of other phenomenon, including a great social evolution that has stood the test of time and weathered the acceptance of people all over the world: the cessation of slavery. In approximately 1840, the underground railway (routes reflected in pictured map) helped to create a thriving community called Lyle Station. This station at the height of its population neared approximately 800 people. The African-American settlers came from Tennessee when

slavery was in vogue in the South. Many outstanding graduates, landholders, and worthy settlers, made this a community to behold. Gibson County points to this achievement and civic contributions with pride and respect.

Gibson County has the distinction of indirectly draining a large area of Indiana. The Wabash River starts in Darke County, Ohio and continues to the Ohio River picking up drainage from the White and Patoka Rivers near Mt. Carmel, Illinois/East Mt. Carmel, Gibson County, Indiana. The river is quite large by the time it reaches the Patoka Access (pictured).



The Wabash helped many early industries flourish. The river was a roadway for agricultural good to the south. A sequestered harbor at Coffee Chute offered a fort on the island for protection. Gibson County was blessed with a pearl industry in the river. Great lumber offerings were slid across the ice in wintertime and saved for sale in Illinois with shipment to many areas. The good Lord's kindness to Gibson County included a diversity of soils and land rekindled by flooding prior to the growing seasons for corn, beans, wheat, and melons which gave diversity for early prosperity. The famous APosey County Melons@ are grown in Gibson County. Alfalfa, verdant grass and early road structures helped promote dairy farming, too. Though very few dairy farms now dot the landscape, the ones operating are excellent and very productive. We are blessed with abundant coal reserves, oil, gas, and a very large power plant that supplies a huge area with abundant power. Manufacturing and assembly have also found a home in Gibson County; providing income for civic prosperity, schools, and our general well being.

The Wabash River started the path to early civilization. The river is a source of pride, history, and livelihood to many who identify with it and its long history. From the three rivers (the Patoka, the West Fork White River, and the fork of the East White River) along to the South line of the county near Griffin, Indiana, we can find traces of tribal history and ancient settlements, to mark where we are today and where we started. We still have two covered bridges, The Old Red Bridge and The Wheeling White Bridge (1875-1876) that mark a time in another century that



reminds us of our progress. The river trail tells the story of our progress and outlook for the future. The river has stood the test of earthquake, flood, and tornado. It is a shame that all of the history is not recorded written history. It was a mile wide and traveled over 300 miles without leaving the ground! The bright and shining Wabash has this all recorded somewhere in its path.

More Gibson County info is at: [http://www.in.gov/mylocal/gibson\\_county.htm](http://www.in.gov/mylocal/gibson_county.htm) or you can get census-type data and a map at [http://www.city-data.com/county/Gibson\\_County-IN.html](http://www.city-data.com/county/Gibson_County-IN.html) . If the mood strikes you, check out the river in Gibson County at [http://in.gov/wrhcc/pdfs/Map\\_9.pdf](http://in.gov/wrhcc/pdfs/Map_9.pdf) or, take the Google Earth “Wabash River Water Trail #9” tour (check under ‘places’ or zoom in on any bridge; once you’ve got the trail in ‘places’, hit “play”).

## **Notes & Quotes** (from Executive Director Ron James):

“River Odyssey: Two Artists Follow the Wabash” ended this past year and I have to say I miss it. These paintings and works of the world connected to the Wabash River, its fishing, its shopping, its cities, towns, farms, fields and wilderness, were my ticket to travel the Corridor and meet many of you. Indeed, I even got to tell some of the tales I picked up along the way at the auction on August 25<sup>th</sup>. Thanks to David Dale and Jim Faulkner, the artists, a large portion of the proceeds was donated to support the projects of your favorite Corridor Commission. I hope you all will stop in and see David (in Muncie) or Jim (in Yorktown), look over their current work and support them as they have us. If you don’t know what you missed, their sites are still up and are worth the look: [http://daviddalefineart.com/River\\_Odyssey/River\\_Odyssey\\_Paintings.htm](http://daviddalefineart.com/River_Odyssey/River_Odyssey_Paintings.htm) and [http://www.faulknerartist.com/River\\_Odyssey/River\\_Odyssey\\_Paintings\\_Index.htm](http://www.faulknerartist.com/River_Odyssey/River_Odyssey_Paintings_Index.htm) .

Though the auction, and River Odyssey itself, was a large production for us in 2007, other accomplishments in 2007 arguably reached even more Wabash-interested folks. The State Fair exhibit – one day alone – allowed us to put over 500 of our ‘signature’ brochures into individual hands and our display was viewed by passing thousands. The first ever Indiana Rivers Rally gathered over 250 river-centric people to the Wabash at West Lafayette for a full three days (or more). De-Trash the Wabash garnered corporate support (and a record number of De-Trashers, at least in Tippecanoe County) sufficient to warrant expansion of the ‘De-Trash Kit’ program. Presentations to Kiwanis and Audubon clubs, watershed network meetings, and school classes, provided hundreds of one-on-one opportunities to spread the Wabash River fever. Just a few weeks ago in Chicago, I was even privileged to speak to about 50 water trail operators from eight Midwestern states (Ohio, Kentucky, Indiana, Michigan, Wisconsin, Illinois, Minnesota and Iowa) as well as North Carolina, Mississippi and Missouri, at the Mid-America Trails and Greenway Conference. It has been a GREAT year.

Of course, I’m not the only one fired up about the Wabash River. And, certainly, I’m not the only one who speaks about its glory. It is up to every one of us to carry the word about our precious resource. I trust in 2008, you will be doing your part.

See you on the river!